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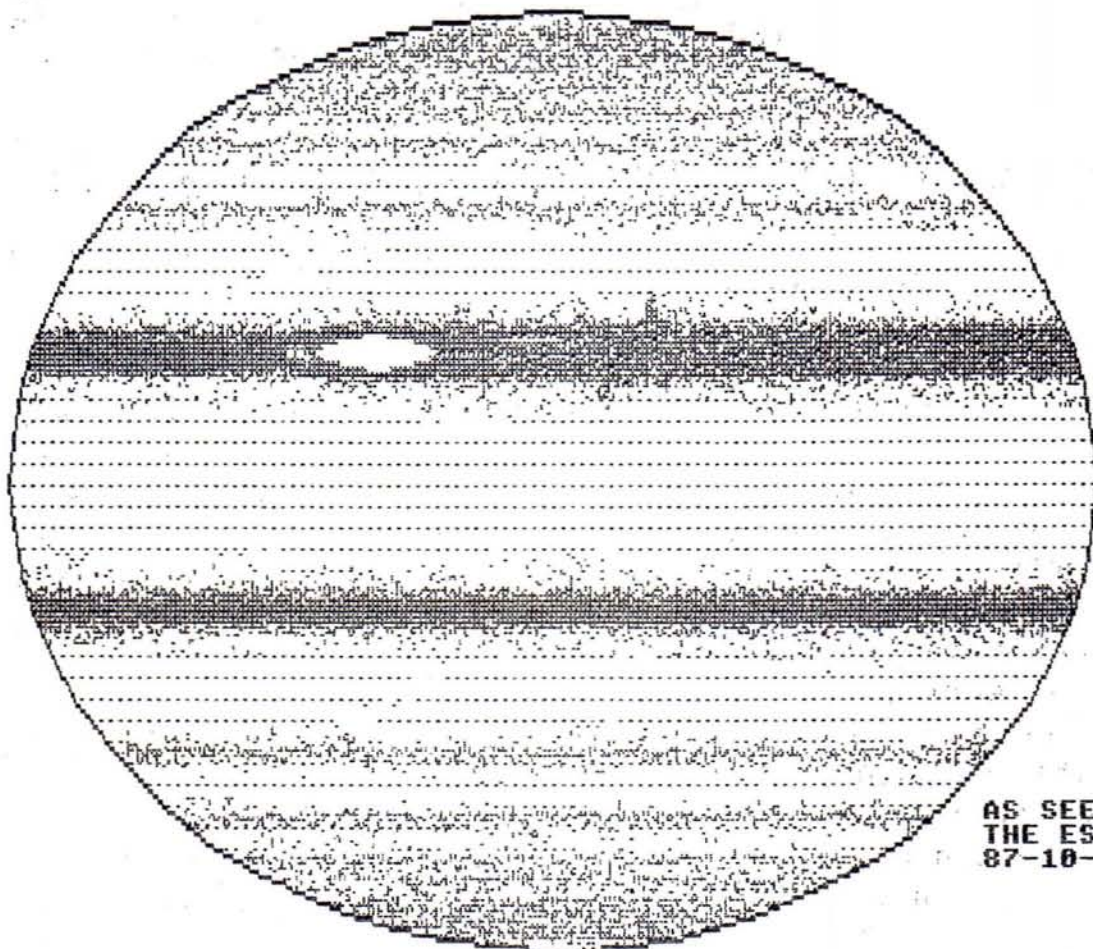
EA

November, 1987

Issue #29

Free

Review of the Edmonton Atari Computer Hobbyists



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E.A.C.H.

E.A.C.H. is an independent non-profit society formed to provide information and support to the *Atari* users of Edmonton and area. The club meets at 7:15 p.m. on the first Tuesday of every month, in room U116 of the Central Services Building at NAIT. See the map on the inside back cover for details.

NEWSLETTER

Articles and inquiries pertaining to this newsletter may be sent to:

R.E.A.C.H.

6220 - 111 Ave.

Edmonton, Alberta

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Ideas and opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author and not necessarily those of the editor, the executive, or the membership as a whole.

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The BEACH - Bulletin Board System	24 hours a day	450-1618

Special Interest Groups

8-bit SIG	Dave Howard	481-1501
ST SIG	Lawrence Rozak	462-1526

Attention Non-Members!

The Edmonton Atari Computer Hobbyists would like to give those readers who are not currently members the opportunity to join our users' group. Benefits include higher access levels on the BEACH, the club's BBS, which provides members with message bases for private and public chatting, and public domain files online. Monthly meetings are held the first Tuesday of every month, giving Atari owners a chance to meet others who share their interest. Also found at these meetings are tutorials and workshops on such *subjects as languages, data bases, and modems*. E.A.C.H. members get a 10% *discount on software at Computer Works and a 5% discount at Trade & Play*.

As well, there are special deals arranged for club members *for cheaper* modems, software, and printer paper.

For those readers who are not presently members of E.A.C.H., you may join now by paying the 1988 \$24.00 membership fee and get the rest of this year free - that's a \$4.00 savings. If you can't make it to the meetings, the newsletter will be mailed out to you; you'll gain full member access to the BEACH BBS; and the discounts alone could save you your membership fee. To join, see Maurice Hilarius, our Treasurer, at the meetings, call him at 456-2521, or write to him at 92 Lorelei Chase, Edmonton, Alberta. See you at the meetings!

Rambblings of the ST SIG

As I mentioned at the Oct. general meeting, I have handed in my resignation as co-ordinator of the ST-SIG. At the December meeting (no November meeting due to Remembrance Day) we will hold nominations and elections for the new co-ordinator at which time he will take over. This makes this meeting very important: please consider people to nominate. If you wish to fill this **exciting** position yourself, let me know. It is with regret that I handed in my resignation.

In regards to the Beginners' Weekend Seminar, I have only received three requests, which is not enough to consider running it. I will contact these persons and see how they are coming along.

Something which I have asked about before was brought up again recently by a parent member. How about something I will call a "Kids' Sig" (for lack of a better term), where kids can play games or pursue any other computer interest? Are there any other members' children out there who would be interested? I will see what I can do to get it off the ground and then let the kids take over.

May I finally express my pleasure in acting as your co-ordinator. It certainly was interesting and gave me the advantage of meeting or talking to most of you personally. Congratulations to the new co-ordinator and may I wish you the best and my full cooperation.

Thank you
Lawrence Rozak

Mr. Editor

Oops.

I suppose that's the word that best describes last month's newsletter. A number of things went wrong, but the most noticeable was the diagram problem. (This was the diagram for Jeff Lewis' B/W Video Generator.) Basically, the first diagram was printed (appears where it should, in the middle of Atari Express: Technical Side), and although it was rather faint, it was felt that it would have to do.

But when I had the opportunity to print a second copy of the diagram that would actually be legible, I decided to let the map go and print the second copy of the diagram in its stead. It didn't work out exactly as planned, either, but I think it is legible. If you are having trouble reading it, talk to me or Jeff and we can get you a new copy. Again, I apologize; next time, we'll almost certainly photocopy the diagrams to prevent this kind of thing.

The stream of articles seems to have dwindled to a trickle recently. Could you please consider writing something? Review, tutorial, commentary, humour piece, tips, hints, whatever?

For those of you who read the exchange newsletters - check out the October edition of The Pokey Press (Atari Computer Club of the Palm Beaches) for the editor's impressions of Edmonton.

Bye for now!

Phil

HEARD IT ON THE GRAPEVINE...

by Rick Adelsberger

On January 7th, 1987, when a somewhat sad and somewhat happy ending came to the BEACH (Bulletin board of the Edmonton Atari Computer Hobbyists) as we then knew it, my job officially began. It was the birth of the new BEACH, as past sysop (system operator) Peter Braun (who has since moved closer to real 'beaches') and I began setting up shop, so to speak. The major difference from the old Beach was the fact that we would now be running the BBS (bulletin board system) on a 520ST and a 20 megabyte hard drive.

Our dreams had come true. Meticulously, and somewhat excitedly, Peter and I started to set up equipment from the moment our beloved President, Doug, delivered it to my door. In a very short time we were standing back admiring what we thought was a job well done. Little did we realize that the work, or, upon reflection, shall we say 'fun', had just begun. Luckily it was a weekend, and only Friday night when we started setting up and testing the software to run the bbs. After we had spent the better part of the weekend, our work was done and everything tested out fine. Now for the real test. Swing open the main gates and greet the 'Beachgoers'.

Well, I'm happy to report that since that first opening of the gates, the Beach has welcomed 10,428 users (as of this writing). That averages about 1000 calls a month, or around 35 per day. Quite a busy place for sure. The Beach has recorded, stored, and relayed 5,967 messages in the various 10 message bases. Some very good constructive conversation has taken place on the Beach. We have to date 384 active registered users online, and the front gates are always open 24 hours a day to greet more. The 12 file areas have also received much use with 4,353 files downloaded and 820 files uploaded, again as of this writing. Things change so rapidly on the Beach that as you read this the totals will likely have increased sizably. Currently the Beach has 541 files online in the various areas. There are 8-bit and

16-bit file sections with an approximately equal number of files online. There are also sections supporting the 'Magic Sac' users and the 'PC Ditto' users. There is also a specific area online to support adventurers, with hints and reviews, from a good ol' pal Jake Ransack.

Also online is a questionnaire which has yielded some very interesting results. Most users that have answered the questionnaire strongly disagreed with the postal strike, thought the minimum wage in Alberta should be \$5.00 an hour, thought the death penalty should be re-instated, and were strongly in favor of seat belt legislation. A bold 82% were in favor of banning smoking in the work place and strongly agreed that Vanna White was the one they would most enjoy sharing a hot tub with. There have been a wide variety of questions asked, as you can see.

After retrieving mail and checking out the various file areas, most folks drop into the casino. There they can indulge in a good game of poker or a quick hand of blackjack. Bets are placed with your download credit and although most users do alright, there have been a few whom I have had to float a small loan to. There is also an information center where I try to keep the latest news online. There are reviews on the newest software, latest developments in the computer world, and even movie reviews for those who are thinking of taking in a movie. There are also files in the editorial section to help folks get around the Beach and make the most out of it.

Throughout the year there have been some very interesting things happening at the Beach and I have thoroughly enjoyed being the sysop. I hope all the 'Beachgoers' have gotten as much enjoyment from the Beach as I have. Looking forward to next year, when plans are in store for bigger and better things....

Rick

(affectionately known as
the BEACHbum online)



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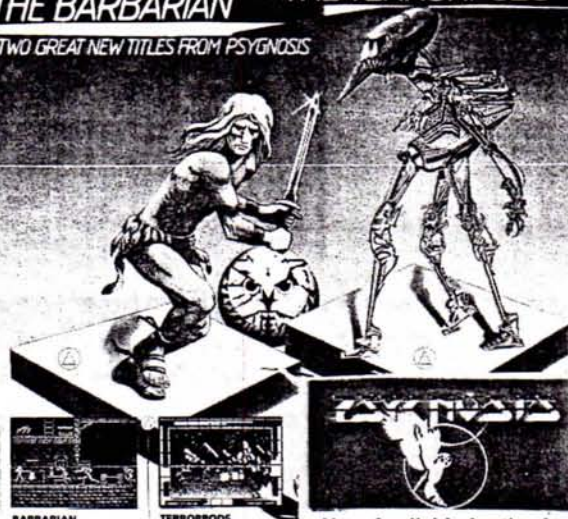
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VISI CLUES

by Michael D. Riley

(Excerpted with thanks from the September / October issue of BYTOWN BYTES, the newsletter of the National Capital Atari Users' Group.)

AUTODUEL TECHNIQUES:

The very first thing you must do is prepare several blank, formatted disks for saving characters. You'll be experimenting with different vehicles, and it's important to save your money on a disk that you can use again; if you die in the game, your character is wiped out, unless you have him/her saved separately. Actually doing the saving is more complicated and not well explained in the documentation. You can make it easier to get ahead in the game by following these steps each time your character reaches a new height:

1. Press 'Q' for Quit/Save. Soon you will be given three options; select "2. Activate an Old Driver". You will be asked if you wish to save your current character. Type "Y". You will be asked to insert a character disk to save him/her. When asked to load the NEW character, leave the same disk in the drive and hit Return. Now you will have a permanent save that the game won't delete until you write over it with a new save, and you will be able to continue playing the game. Admittedly, this takes time, but that's life... or death.

2. Don't give your character too much mechanical ability when creating your character; you can buy this later.

3. After winning a few times at Amateur Night in the arena, you will have enough prize money to build your first car. Keep it just UNDER \$5000, and you will be able to compete at Level 5 forever. This is a time-consuming but guaranteed way to build up prize money and prestige. When you have made lots of money, you will be able to build any kind of vehicle you want, and have the freedom to experiment. You could do the same thing with a Level 10 car and on up the line; the prize money always gets bigger.

4. Always check the rumours; they change every month and at various levels of prestige. Eventually you will be rewarded with real clues.

5. If you own a vehicle, and are ready to build a new one, don't bother with the time and expense of storing the first one at the garage. This will be done for you automatically at the assembly plant.

6. LOTS OF ARMOUR and one or two weapons when you start is the best plan if you want to survive on the highway. Some of those outlaws can chew away 10 or 15 points with every blast.

7. Whatever the vehicle, leave enough Weight and Spaces (room) to carry AADA courier tasks and to pick up salvage from defeated enemies. I like to leave 8 or 10 spaces, and between 500 and 900 pounds. Otherwise, every cretin you rub out will have nothing you can salvage, because you don't have enough room.

8. You may have to make a round trip with no cargo on board (thereby earning

VISI CLUES

fewer prestige points), but going from city to city is the only way to get your clues. Of course, you can always take the bus... I did, to get my first one.

9. Don't fight everything that moves on the highway. No matter how good you get, there's always someone better. When your armour starts to wear thin, try to outrun dangerous foes. If the power plant you chose is big enough (and you should have enough money for a "12" if you follow these tips), you can easily get away. Remember, visiting each city is the only way to get ahead, so survival is critically important.

10. If you fight long enough at the same level in any given arena, the salvage pickings start to thin out. This must be intended to keep you from playing the whole game against the same five enemies, who are always in the same location every time you AutoDuel at the same level. Their weapons and cargo vary only a little.

11. You cannot buy your 99th Mechanic point. But you will earn it.

12. The first complete clue is "San Antonio Rose".

Well, I hope this helps some of you who otherwise would not have continued in the game. But let me just say that anyone could have figured all this out, given a few spare hours. I mean, I did, and I'm no Ace when it comes to this kind of stuff... not yet, anyway.

QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS (Infocom)

Q: (July/Aug 87) How does one get in the orphanage, and avoid getting a headache from the ion transmitter; and is it necessary to go through the labyrinth, and can you survive it?

VISI: Put the baby in the basket and leave it on the doorstep. You will automatically hide. To avoid ions, at My Kinda Dock set your barge to leave while you are ON THE DOCK, then eventually climb down the well in the garden. If enough time has gone by (about 18 moves) you will appear on the barge on the other side of the ion transmitter. You must go through the labyrinth to get the photo of Jean Harlow. It is a real pain, but the only way to survive is to jump, clap, and whatever else the comic says every five turns. It's a pain because each action takes a turn, so actually end up doing this every two turns. The arrow on the map shows where you enter the labyrinth, and the square rooms contain the important stuff.

HITCH HIKER'S GUIDE (Infocom)

Q: What's the trick to assembling the Improbability Drive?

VISI: Plug the small plug on the Drive into the small receptacle in the Atomic Vector Plotter, and put the long dangly bit into the cups of fake tea. Plug the large plug into the large receptacle from the bridge. Your next puzzle, however, will be to figure out which single time you can use the Drive with any actual control.



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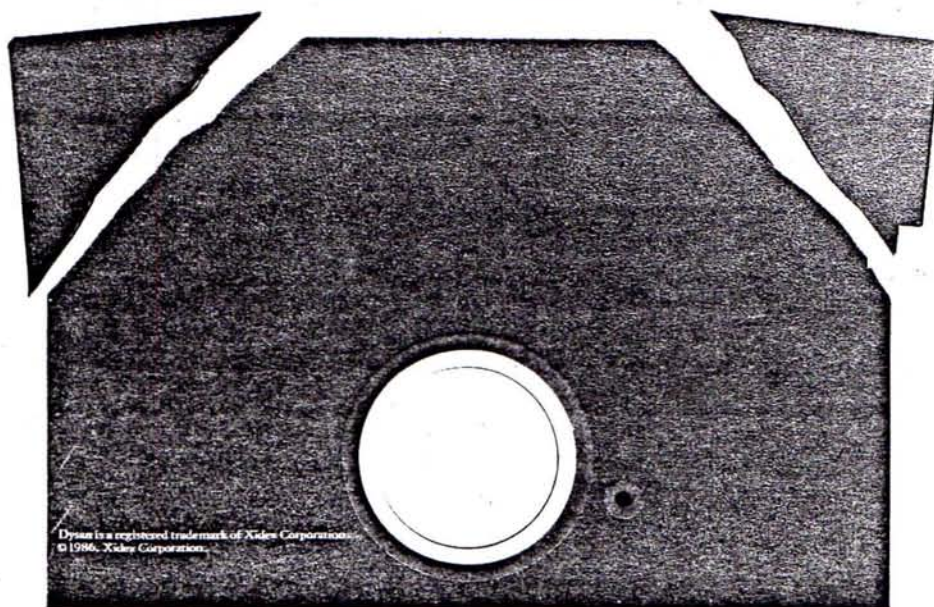
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ST Tips

- Disk Formats by Bob Deskin

(This article reprinted with thanks from the September / October issue of BYTOWN BYTES, the newsletter of the National Capital Atari Users' Group.)

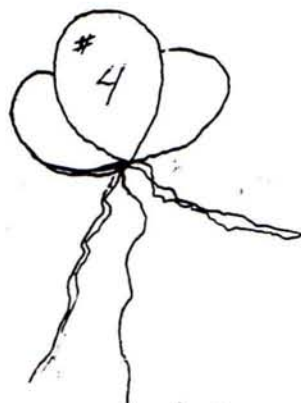
Extended disk formatting programs have been around for a long time, but recently there has been a lot of talk about "twisted" formats. What's an extended format, twisted or not, and are they safe?

First, let's look at the way a 3 1/2 inch diskette is formatted for standard usage. For simplicity, I will stick with single-sided disks. Data is organized in sectors. Each sector is 512 bytes long or one-half K (a K is 1024 bytes - remember, this is binary, so a simple 1000 is not quite accurate. Even though a sector is 512 bytes, any file takes an even number of sectors. So if a file takes one sector, another is used up evening things up. This explains why the space available is not simply the total space on the disk minus the space used for files. There is usually wasted space due to the even number of sectors rule. Also, any sub-directory (folder) entries are treated as files, so a folder also takes two sectors or 1K. This is a good reason not to get carried away with directories and sub-directories. It's very easy to use up all the space on your disk.

Disks are formatted into tracks, concentric circles of sectors. In the standard format there are 80 tracks of 9 sectors each, or 720 sectors

(360 K or 368,640 bytes) on a single sided disk. So why do you only get 349 K or 357,376 bytes? Because some of the space is used for the directory and associated information so the system can find things on the disk. There is a Boot record that takes up one sector (which actually means two sectors since the minimum is two). The Directory itself takes 7 sectors (rounded up to the nearest even number makes 8). Each entry in the Directory is 32 bytes long which gives a total of 112 entries. An entry can be a file or a folder. So you can have a total of 112 files and folders on a disk. As well, there is a file called the File Allocation Table or FAT. It is used to keep track of where files are on the disk, since a large file can be spread out over many sectors and tracks. The FAT is 5 sectors (rounded up to 6), and there are two copies. The total of the Boot record, Directory, and FAT (two copies) is 22 sectors or 11K. The original 360K less 11K leaves the standard 349K or 357,376 bytes you get if you format a disk with the standard disk format from the desktop. All the extended and twister formats use the standard directory structure, so always subtract 11K from the value obtained by multiplying tracks times sectors divided by two.

There are two ways of increasing available space: increasing the number of sectors per track or increasing the number of tracks per disk. If we squeeze more sectors on a track, the disk drive may not be able to pick up the information fast enough. There is more than just 512



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ST Tips

bytes of data in a sector, there's information that the disk drive and operating system needs. We can only compress things so far. From everything I've seen, extended formatters use 9 or 10 sectors per track. Apparently going to 11 sectors is too much for reliability.

Adding tracks is the other way, and various formatters add one, two, or even three tracks, giving 83. The catch is that apparently some disk drives will not read the extra tracks. If you use an extended format based on more than 80 tracks, make sure your disk drive is reading and writing the extra tracks.

The following table (at the bottom of this page - REACH ed.) shows the data area (after subtracting 11K) available on the various formats.

Is it safe? Well, the only format that is guaranteed is what your machine does by default, which is the desktop formatter. This gives 80 tracks at 9 sectors per track. From everything I've read, using 10 sectors per track and 80 tracks is also quite reliable. Just remember you won't be able to do disk to disk copies by dragging one disk icon to another.

Also, make sure you have backup copies of everything just in case. You might want to keep special backups on standard format disks.

So far we've just discussed formats, now on to "twisted". Dave Small of Magic Sac fame wrote an article in the Spring 1987 issue of STart magazine describing an extended format that twisted the sectors around the tracks. The extended format was 10 sectors per track, 80 tracks per disk. Instead of having all the sector number 1's lined up, they were offset, so that sector 1 of track 0 (sectors are numbered 1 to 10, but tracks are numbered 0 to 79 - I don't know why) lined up with sector 9 of track 1, which lined up with sector 7 of track 2, and so on. The idea was to reduce the amount of time the disk read/write head was doing nothing. Read the article if you want the technicalities. The whole idea is to speed up reading and writing; twisting doesn't affect the capacity of the disk. Does it work? Yes, a 120 000 byte file can be read 27% faster and written 19% faster. The difference is that when a file is being written, it is actually written and re-read. This is called write-verify. Also, a directory entry must be written.

Tracks per disk	9 sectors per track	10 sectors per track
80	349K (357,376 bytes)	389K (398,336 bytes)
81	353.5K (361,984 bytes)	394K (403,456 bytes)
82	358K (366,952 bytes)	399K (408,576 bytes)
83	362.5K (371,200 bytes)	404K (413,696 bytes)

ST Tips

Is the twisted format safe? Again, from what I've read and tried, it's as reliable as the untwisted 10 sector / 80 track format. As usual, make sure you have backups.

To close out formats, the programs that provide extended formatting include Dave Small's Twister program from STart, the extended formatter from the February 1987 Compute's ST, the public domain 410KFT program, and the shareware program DCOPY.

In the same article that described Twister, Dave Small discussed write-verify. He contends that if your disk drive is in good working order, then using write-verify is not needed. For a slight added risk, you can speed up disk writing to almost equal reading. Again the difference is that the directory entry must be written when creating a file.

I have tested the various combinations to see what effect Twister had over a simple 10 sector per track format, and also what effect write-verify has. The larger the file, the greater the impact. All

the percentages quoted here are based on a 120 000 byte file and use desktop copying, that is dragging the file

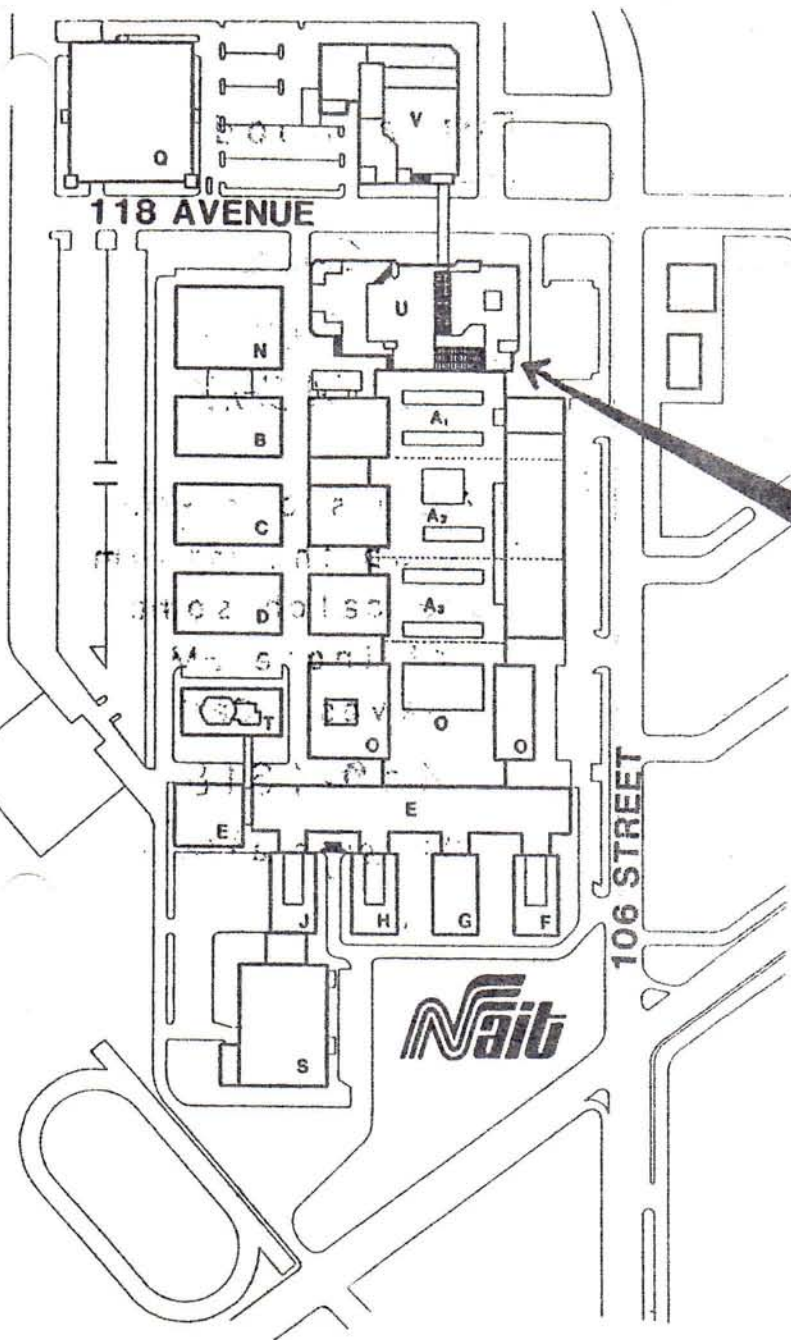
icon onto the target window. While the 10 sector per track format can be written about 5% faster than the 9 sector per track format, the twisted 10 sector format is 19% faster.

The twisted format can be read 27% faster. Turning write-verify off gives a 41% saving with the standard format. For the largest saving, turn write-verify off and use the twister format. With the test file, the saving was 57%, from 30.4 seconds to 13.1 seconds. Reading the file in twister format took 11.4 seconds versus 15.6 seconds with the standard format (obviously, turning write-verify off doesn't do anything to help reading). If you use a utility to do your copying, the twisted format may not be faster. It depends on the amount of data read and written at one time.

Twisted formats apparently work faster with small amounts of data (1K at a time), while using large buffers may actually be slower. You'll just have to test the utilities you use.

DECEMBER means CHRISTMAS

and that means it's time to continue our tradition of accepting donations for a Christmas charity at the December general meeting. This year, throw a few bucks in the hat on December 1 for the Christmas Bureau - it'll make you feel good! :)



ENTRY

TO ROOM U116 IN THE
CENTRAL SERVICES BLDG

EACH meets on the first **TUESDAY**
of each month at 7:15 pm at **N.A.I.T.**

UPCOMING EVENTS

ST SIG:

There will be no ST SIG meeting during November because the meeting would fall on Remembrance Day (Nov. 11), and NAIT will be closed. It's not possible to book another time for the SIG meeting, unfortunately, so this meeting must fall by the wayside. You can spend the extra time thinking about who to nominate for ST SIG co-ordinator at the December SIG meeting! (See Lawrence Rozak's article in this issue.)

GENERAL MEETING: December 1

The next general meeting of the Edmonton Atari Computer Hobbyists will be held Tuesday, December 1 at 7:15 p.m. in room U116 of the Central Services Building at NAIT (see the map on the inside back cover). This is it, folks - election time! Come on out and participate! Also feel free to bring software to demo, hardware to be used, or anything you want to sell or swap. And don't forget to support the Christmas Bureau!

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